

2013-2014 League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara Annual Reports

President



Celebrate Service is the theme of this year's Annual Meeting. Albert Schweitzer wrote, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

We celebrate the service of the women and men we honor, but also the efforts of each one of us. Our work as a League to address the critical issues of our time and to continue our many Voter Service activities is crucial. We value the service of each member and appreciate the efforts of each of us to continue the efforts begun 94 years ago. The challenges are great and the commitment is strong.

The board has continued its work to update policies and board member job descriptions this past year.

We also entered into a new three-year contract with the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority to conduct elections for tenant councils in housing units and the two tenant commissioners on the Board of Commissioners. We are currently named in a lawsuit related to this year's tenant commissioner election and have been served with a temporary restraining order for conducting that election until the judge rules. Our hope is that the judge rules on June 16 and we can conduct the election.

Last summer, we began a process for long-range planning for LWVBN with a fine retreat with the board and committee chairs that we followed up with a meeting on November 7. And then the president "dropped the ball" and no one held her accountable. I do hope to address this important issue again this summer. We welcome any interested League member to participate as usual. I promise not to twist arms for assuming responsibility to lead efforts you suggest.

Dorothy Tao continues her fine work to publicize League events and has recently begun to update our Facebook page on a regular basis. We know that young people turn to social networks as a main source of information.

Janet Massaro and **Joan Photiadis** chair the local committees for the state studies on Term Limits for elected Officials and Ballot Access. I hope you have been reading the fine background material in the *Voter*. We will host an informational meeting about Term Limits this summer.

While the efforts for Campaign Finance Reform hit a snag when the governor made a budget deal that eliminated consideration of public financing for state wide offices except for the state comptroller's race at this time, the League is still active with other good government groups in pursuit of public financing for campaigns for all statewide offices. Recently, the Buffalo City Council gave unanimous approval to a resolution inviting eleven diverse groups to form a committee to study public financing for all city elections. **Janet Massaro** has agreed to represent the League on that committee.

We continue to publish board minutes on our web site soon after they have been approved by the board and highlight board actions in each edition of the *Voter*.

Terri Parks

Finance/ Investment Committee

After much research and discussion, we decided to invest the \$40,000 of LWVBN's monies that were in a no-interest earning account into no-load mutual fund stocks held by TIAA-CREF. By consensus, the Committee chose to invest into the following vehicles. Lori Robinson, Treasurer, executed initial Investments.

Growth & Income Equities TIIRX –	\$10,750.00
Mid-cap Equities TCMVX –	\$10,750.00
Social Choice Equities TICRX –	\$16,000.00
Bonds TIORX –	\$ 2,500.00

This \$40,000 investment, started in September 2013, grew to \$44,329.38 by March 2014. A member of the Finance Committee is monitoring each of the investment vehicles as follows:

Social Choice Equities TICRX – Judith Clarke
Bonds TIORX – Lori Robinson
Growth & Income Equities TIIRX – Pat Costanzo
Mid-cap Equities TCMVX – Lyle Toohey

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In honor of the memory of Mary Zaehring, the committee recommended and the board approved the use of donations to the League in Mary's memory to establish the *Mary Zaehring Fund to Recognize Outstanding Leadership and Service to the League* (*Mary Zaehring Fund*, for short) The fund is restricted for purchasing mementos for honorees of the Joan K. Bozer Leadership Award, the LEE Award, and any other award that may be created and given to members of the League (*from the February 2014 board minutes.*)

After discussing the committee's recommendation for use of the Nancy E. Rhyther bequest, the Board approved using a portion of the bequest to pay for necessary technology and related upgrades and the remainder be invested into our present investment vehicle(s) and to pay a bonus to Mary Ann Turkla in recognition of the extraordinary time and effort she devoted to researching our technology needs.

To date, we have purchased a desperately needed new computer to and accessories (mouse, monitor, laser printer and software). These funds may also be used to purchase a sound system and two microphones that at this time we believe will cost about \$1000.

Committee Members: Terri Parks, Lori Robinson, Lyle Toohey, Judith Clarke Mary Ann Turkla, **Pat Costanzo, Chair**

Transportation/Waterfront Committee

The transportation/waterfront committee members kept in touch through email and events. Following on the successful auto tour of last June, our focus was on the Outer Harbor of Buffalo, with a specific interest in the 21st Century Park proposal, which would dedicate 120 acres for public parkland.

Five of us met at Joan Bozer's home on December 4 to view the renderings of the 21st Century Park. JoAnn Mecca continued to monitor the meetings of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation. Gladys Gifford made a presentation on the Outer Harbor and the park proposal to the Women's Association of the UU Church in Buffalo, February 20. Many of us

attended the forum held May 1 at the Saturn Club, Buffalo, to hear how the process for creating the Brooklyn Bridge Park could apply to Buffalo's Outer Harbor.

The committee reorganized at a meeting on May second. League members and friends are encouraged to join as we continue our focus on waterfront and transportation issues.

Committee Members: JoAnn Mecca, Beth Kaufman, Janet Massaro, Joan Bozer, Marie Hanrahan, Joan LoCurto. **Gladys Gifford, chair**

Volunteer Coordinator

Citizenship Ceremonies: Between July 2013 and June 2014 Forty-four League members represented the LWVBN at Naturalization Ceremonies where they congratulated 1120 new citizens and handed out Voter Registration Forms.

League Speakers in the community: We had two invitations for speakers from community groups, which were fulfilled by our volunteers.

Moderator and timekeeper services: The volunteer coordinator helped find volunteers for moderating and timekeeping for several candidate forums.

In addition, we were able to schedule the Naturalization Ceremony dates with volunteer commitments through Dec. 2014. The organization of paper work for these ceremonies was updated so that everything can be sent electronically.

Judith Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator

Education Committee

Throughout the past year we have focused on gaining understanding of the newly adopted Common Core Learning Standards and the resulting controversy over their implementation. How does this measure up to League's Position on the Role of the Federal Government?

We discussed Buffalo's concentration of poverty and its huge influx of refugee youngsters, who urgently need wrap-around social and health services before test scores improve. There is a

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great need for equity based on need.

In October we attended the "Summit for Smarter Schools" sponsored by the Partnership for Smarter Schools, an anti high-stakes testing group seeking other ways to measure student achievement and teacher effectiveness. 2,500 attended. Members attended another forum on "The Common Core Standards: Hope, Hype and High Stakes at D'Youville College.

Molly Dana, parent activist from West Seneca, was our guest speaker in November, when we heard about the "opting out" movement. Dr. Laura Klenk, an Assistant Professor in Literacy at Buffalo State, our guest speaker in January, shared information on the portions of the Common Core requirements with which she works.

The new book, "Reign of Error", by education historian, Diane Ravitch, enlightened us about the Privatization Movement, which is greatly affecting public education.

In March we co-sponsored a FORUM for the community "Learn More about Common Core", with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, featuring Dr. Mark Garrison, Professor Education Policy & Research, and panelists: Mr. Robert Christmann, Dr. Mira Berkley, Molly Dana and Danilo Lawvere.

Again we were asked to monitor lotteries at some Charter Schools.

Committee Members: Lee Tetkowski, Marlene Katzel, Marian Deutschman, Joan Photiadis, Maxine Insera, Jo Ann Mecca, Dorothy Tao, and Elsa Bondar

Natural Resources Committee

October 2013 found us participating in "Food on your Plate" with Sandy Chelnov presenting a workshop that highlighted the Low Carbon Diet and efforts related to Climate Smart Communities. She also attended seminars and as a League representative to WNY Environmental Alliance succeeded in getting Climate Change approved as a point of emphasis.

We presented skits at the "Food" event incorporating "It's in the Bag," featuring a rap by

Lee Lambert encouraging ALL to ALWAYS use reusable bags when shopping. Ellen Moomaw, Joan Herold, Judy Weidemann, Sandy Chelnov and Ellen Neumaier performed the Climate Change skit that shows what each of us can do to reduce our own personal carbon footprint.

The committee is working with officials and community members, mostly in East Aurora, toward Climate Smart Communities goals. Judy Weidemann heads up a community group that encourages citizens to get involved. A display, designed by Jeanette DeJong, in Vidler's window will advertise our efforts.

Food and Food Safety incorporates many issues. We will be working with others to present a very interesting program for the September 2014 Kick Off Event.

Committee Members: Sandy Chelnov, Ellen Moomaw, Lynn Wilkins, Judy Weidemann, Sue Marom, PJ Fraser, Joan Herold, Nicole Morris-McLaughlin, **Ellen Neumaier chair**

Election Services

The League of Women Voters Election Services Committee's main responsibility is conducting tenant council elections at the various Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority [BMHA] sites scattered around the city. The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development mandates that a neutral third party conduct these elections. Our League is that neutral third party. We submitted a proposal to BMHA, which eventually resulted in another three-year contract with the housing authority. Terri Parks, and Kathleen McCarthy were instrumental in securing that agreement.

Currently, we are involved with the BMHA Tenant Commissioners' election. There are two seats on the BMHA board, which must be filled with tenant members. This is a city-wide election that occurs every two years. Due to the complexity and scope of this election, this committee is involved with additional demands of planning and participation.

Many thanks to this committee's most active members: Marlene Katzel, Ramona Gallagher, Mary M. Egan, Judy Capodicasa, JoAnn Mecca,

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Marge Gardner, Kathleen McCarthy, Janet Massaro, **Alan Dozoretz, Chair**

Membership Committee

Fall and winter committee meetings were held to address increasing the league membership numbers and Membership Leader Development monthly conference calls were held with our state coach, Lisa Scott.

A spring membership social April 30th at the Network was well attended and a number of our committees and our president updated current and near future league programs and volunteer opportunities. It was a fine orientation to the League and how it works and an important learning experience for us all. We continue to seek ways to encourage participation long or short term and suggestions are always welcome. Ramona Gallagher, Judy Weidemann, Judy Huber, Dorothy Tao, **Judy Metzger, chair**

LWVBN Web Page

The total number of visits to the LWVBN web site, **lwvbn.org**, from May 2013 through April 2014 was 10,939 reflecting an increase from the previous three years. The peak months for visits were September, October, and November, reflecting in election information available during these months. Web traffic statistics for the past four years are given below.

Visits During Year from May through Following April

	Total Visits	Non-Election Months Average	Election Months Average
2010-11	10193	599	1600
2011-12	9710	693	1158
2012-13	10855	701	1515
2013-14	10939	794	1265

A new look to the web site was introduced in June to improve the layout and structure.

Kristin Allen, LWVBN Webmaster

Issues and Action Committee

Representatives from the program committees form the Issues and Action Committee. Our role is to discuss and recommend approval of program events and actions proposed by those committees and other League members. Most actions are in

the form of letters to the Buffalo News or elected officials and must conform to our positions. Based on those recommendations, the board decides whether to grant approval or denial. This reduces the time the board must consider program issues during their busy meeting age

The League hosted or co-sponsored these programs:

- The September “kick-off” panel discussion: *DEMOCRACY AT RISK with the theme statement, “Widespread poverty and concentrated wealth cannot long endure side by side in a democracy.” Thomas Jefferson*
- County Executive Mark Poloncarz described his “*Initiatives for a Smart Economy*”
- Erie County Sheriff’s Deputy, Elizabeth Fildes ably presented “*Challenges and Strategies To Combat Human Trafficking*”
- The contentious topic of Common Core and High States Testing was debated by a panel, and by the audience at *LEARN MORE ABOUT COMMON CORE: A FORUM FOR THE COMMUNITY.*
- We co-sponsored a viewing of the Robert Reich film, “*Inequality for All*”, and a talk by University of Massachusetts Economics professor, Dr. Robert Pollin.
- The Local Government Committee assembled a panel of county officials in May to discuss the topic, “*Can we afford NOT to raise county property taxes?*”

Our involvement with voter education includes recommending approval of questions for our Vote 411 and Voters’ Guide. We also recommend legislative and program priorities for board approval for the state and national program as well as for our Local Program Focus.

As the committee looks to the start of a new League year, we’re giving consideration to future educational topics to educate ourselves the public before the 2014 election.

Janet Goodsell, Chair



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Voter Services

Voter Registration Drive. Forty-one volunteers plus our office manager participated in our 2013 Voter Registration efforts; nineteen of them worked at more than one venue. We had 19 venues. Forty completed registrations were delivered to the Erie County Board of Election with a few going to the Niagara County. We also handed out 48 change of address forms and 3 absentee ballot applications. Finally, we distributed 58 blank forms and 19 absentee ballot applications. The Drive was held at local farmers' markets, WNY Coalition for the Homeless, Walmart Stores and other venues. Kate Wagner, Co-chair

Voters Guide 24,000 copies were delivered to 370 distribution sites. Everything in the printed guide is also available at Vote411 from our website www.lwvbn.org. Updating our distribution lists, producing and delivering the Voters Guide takes many LWVBN volunteer efforts.

Pre-Primary Debate for Mayor of Buffalo This debate was presented by WNED-TV, WBFO-FM, WGRZ-TV and the Buffalo News in partnership with the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara at the WNED studios. Three candidates participated: Byron Brown, Bernard Tolbert and Sergio Rodriguez.

Fall Political Candidate Meetings League volunteer moderators and timekeepers participated in the following political candidate meetings: Aurora Senior Center on October 17; Amherst Senior Center, October 24, and Union-Pleasant Elementary School in Hamburg on October 24

Board of Education Candidate Meetings League volunteer moderators and timekeepers participated in the following board of education candidate meetings: Ken-Ton, Amherst, Starpoint, East Aurora Board and Hamburg

Joyce Bol, chair



Social Economic Justice Education

The committee had a busy year. We presented the September 2013 Kick Off Program, "Democracy At Risk", with co-sponsor, AAUW. Supporting organizations for this event included the WNY Peace Center, Coalition for Economic Justice, St. Joseph University Parish Social Justice Concerns Committee, and the Partnership for the Public. Four panelists addressed an audience of about 100 at the Burchfield Penney Auditorium.

Other actions included a letter to the editor- Buffalo News objecting to federal government cuts to the food stamps program. With board support, we requested LWVUS to move their Federal Fiscal Policy position to the front burner. Following deliberation, that position was identified as a tier three priority for 2014. At the LWVUS 2014 Convention our representatives, Terri Parks and Ramona Gallagher, were enabled to support other Leagues' caucus issue, Living Wage, which was a proposed concurrence with the Living Wage position adopted in 2000 by the LWV of Kansas.

We updated our Outlook for Work, and continued learning more about wealth/income inequality. We co-sponsored with the SUNY Buffalo State the April 24 Crisis Film program which featured Robert Reich's "Inequality for All". We used the LWVBN Allied Organizations and grassroots network to publicize the April 24 event and a complimentary April 25 lecture by visiting UMass Economics Professor Robert Pollin. Several committee members along with other LWVBN members had viewed and discussed Reich's film when it appeared at a local cinema last fall.

Our focus has been on LWVUS Federal Fiscal Policy. Next we will revisit our Outlook for Work and consider how we can re-focus our efforts. It should be noted that the committee has received substantial support from the Issues Committee and the LWVBN board. Thanks to all of you including event participants.

Committee Members: Ramona Gallagher, Marian Deutschman, Judy Huber, Judy Frank, Joan Photiadis, Sue Stievater, Joyce Bol, Anne Huberman, Dorothy Tao, Judy Metzger, Suzanne Kelley, Lynne Vallone, **Lynda Stephens, chair**

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LWVBN Voter

For the first time, The Voter had co-editors, Sandy Chelnov, who sorted through and edited all copy, and Barbara Jezioro, who put it all together in "Word Publisher" format, before sending it to the printer. On the negative side, we found that copy deadlines are often overlooked while content could be more concise and on point. However, positive results far outflanked the negative. Ranging from four to eight pages, ten issues of The Voter were published this past year. Committee chairs and Board members supplied the content. Office manager, Mary Ann Turkla efficiently e-mailed The Voter to all members with a computer connection. Those who preferred a paper product were well served by the energetic efforts of Sally Metzger, who folded, sealed and mailed over two hundred copies per issue. Our league Webmaster, Kris Allen, made sure that the Voter was posted to the LWVBN website. The Voter also appears on the state website.

Barbara Jezioro, Editor

Local Government

Following the adoption of our program item at the annual meeting - to examine and investigate the Erie County budget and budget process for the purpose of taking action, we proceeded to prepare substantive programs to educate League members and the general public. We scheduled interviews with some county legislators and department heads using a specific set of questions we developed. Voter articles were prepared to familiarize members with county budget issues. Two members attended a Landbank program. One member attended a meeting of the Citizen's Budget Review Commission. We reviewed David Stebbins handout on the "Ten Principles for Successful Public/Private Partnerships" following our successful May meeting in 2013.

We arranged to have County Executive Poloncarz speak at a public meeting in November at the Harlem Road Community Center auditorium on his new Initiatives for a Smart Economy. The Sales Tax Distribution PowerPoint was updated and put online. Kelly Dixon, project manager at the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional

Transportation Council (GBNRTC) did a presentation on One Region Forward at our public meeting. It is a grant-funded project with a focus on a more sustainable Buffalo Niagara. Several committee members attended the subsequent GBNRTC hands-on interactive workshops.

Committee members attended mid-year and year end county budget hearings. Marian Deutschman made a statement on behalf of the LWVBN at the public hearing on the budget. We maintained contact with Assembly member Sean Ryan's office on the JOBS Act that included sections on IDAs. We are proposing a meeting in the fall and a consensus meeting after the public portion of the meeting to prepare budget recommendations to submit to the county executive. In the interim, we had a May 6 meeting at Chef's restaurant with five panel members (Scott Bylewski, chair of the 2013 Erie County Citizens Budget Review Commission; Ken Vetter, executive director of the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority; Joseph Lorigo, majority leader of the legislature; Richard Tobe, deputy county executive; Tim Callan, deputy budget director) entitled "Erie County: Can we afford NOT to raise the county property taxes?"

We had "Another Voice" article on the editorial page of the Buffalo News that incorporated guidelines from the 2009 LWVBN study on consolidation and mergers. We also sent email messages to two reporters at the Buffalo News regarding that study. We participated in the April 8 news conference in which the county executive linked IDA tax breaks to equal pay for women.

Committee members: Dot Brown, Lynne Vallone, Janet Massaro, Lynda Stephens, Arlene Miles, Anne Huberman,
Marian Deutschman, chair

**I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I
woke and I saw that life is all service. I
served and I saw that service is joy.**

Kahlil Gibran